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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the ways in which: (1) gender affects the balance of home and school life among teachers of young children; and (2) the balance of home and school life affects teachers' notion of professional commitment. Data were gathered through the observation of three experienced kindergarten teachers, one male and two female. Observations were subsequently related to ideas about professionalism from the literature on women and work and on professionalism in teaching. Findings indicated that home affected work and vice versa. Effects were both day-to-day and long-term, with long-term effects being more significant to the teachers. Findings suggested several conclusions about professionalism and the relation of home and work in early childhood education. (RH)

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DOES HOME HINDER PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT?  
THE CASE OF EARLY EDUCATION

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DOES HOME HINDER PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT? THE CASE OF EARLY  
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This study investigated how gender affects the balance of home and school life among teachers of young children, and examined how that balance affected teachers' notion of professional commitment. The study accomplished these goals by observing three highly experienced kindergarten teachers, one male and two female, and by relating the observations to ideas about professionalism from the literatures on women and work, and on professionalism in teaching.

FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

Recent research on teaching has produced important insights about how teachers themselves view their own work and careers (1). This approach has stimulated new appreciation for how gender, and especially female gender, affects individuals' views of teaching. Earlier, more critical views of the effects of gender on teaching (2) have given way to newer, more complimentary views of women as teachers of young children. This has happened even though the "facts" about women have not changed much in the last twenty years. Women still form the majority of teachers, especially in elementary and early childhood education. And for various reasons they still show marked tendencies to interrupt or limit their teaching careers (3). The interruptions are especially noticeable in early childhood education, and actually characterize even the small minority of males who teach this age-group as well (4).

But recent research on women and teaching has interpreted the interruptions in new, more positive ways than before. No longer are they considered automatic evidence of "lack of commitment" to teaching. On the contrary: they may signify positive efforts to integrate home and school, or the personal and professional. When studied case by case, female teachers with interrupted careers often express strong commitment to teaching, even when they happen not be employed at a particular moment in time (5).

But does this way of construing interruptions apply to men as well as women? Earlier analyses of teachers portrayed male teachers as feeling trapped, and female ones as lacking commitment (6). Newer analyses have really revised only the female part of this equation. Little attempt has been made to compare male and female teachers directly, using revised ideas of professionalism from the scholarship on women in education.

This study addressed this ambiguity by comparing how the competing demands of home and school were resolved in the life of three highly experienced kindergarten teachers, one male and two female. Using ethnographic techniques, but not full-scale ethnography, the study investigated these teachers' commitment to working with young children over the course of their teaching careers. In particular it explored how pressures and expectations from personal life affected work life, and vice versa. The relationships between home and school, in turn, helped reveal the kind of professional commitment held by these teachers; or more precisely, it showed what the teachers meant by the notion of "professional commitment." When and how much did these teachers show intrinsic, internal-

ized commitment to teaching, such as found by Biklen? How much did they consider themselves still teachers, even when not currently working in a classroom?

#### METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

The study used three early childhood teachers--Randy, Louise, and Janice--each chosen for the following qualities:

- (1) Each was highly experienced (10 years or more in teaching, mostly with young children
- (2) Each had experienced at least one substantial interruption to his or her work (minimum interruption = one year);
- (3) Each made an articulate informant about his or her personal and professional history, and about the circumstances of teaching.
- (4) Not all three were of the same sex.

Three teachers who met these criteria were found through word-of-mouth nominations, and led to individuals who were typical of teachers on Qualities #1 and #2, but with higher educational attainments than most teachers in their community. Although this fact may have made them more committed than usual, it probably made them rather articulate as well, and therefore skilled as research informants.

The teachers were observed with a combination of participant observation, open-ended interviews, and occasional telephone conversations. These tasks were shared by the authors of this study. One or the other observer visited a teacher for one or two hours per week. Visits occurred over a six-month period, and averaged one per week, although they hap-

pened more frequently during the first half of the study than during the second half. Early visits emphasized classroom observations, but interviews and conversations dominated the meetings increasingly as time went on, and eventually constituted the bulk of the contacts with each of the teachers. The conversations dwelled on three topics: 1) how the teachers became interested in early education, 2) how their motivation to teach changed over the years, and 3) how they currently organized their personal and professional lives.

Most of these interviews took place over lunch hour at the teachers' schools; but occasionally they happened at a local restaurant, and on one occasion in a teacher's home. Data for the study, then, consisted of field notes from school visits, transcripts and notes of interviews, and field notes from lunch conversations. In all, about 300 pages of information accumulated about the teachers, representing about 100 hours of contact time with them. When interviews were not taped, notes from the interview were rewritten and elaborated within a few hours after the interview. Quotations in these cases were approximations of the teachers' words, rather than exact reproductions.

As notes and interviews accumulated, both authors coded and classified them so as to reveal evidence about the balance of home and school, and about the consequent nature of the teachers' commitment to early education. The method of constant comparison was used in this part of the analysis in order to arrive at sensible, valid categories within the body of data itself (7). Each author classified the results in this way independently, but then collaborated with the other to achieve a stable con-

sensus for interpreting the results. As this consensus emerged, the results were also compared to other published literature on teachers' commitment to teaching.

### RESULTS

For all three teachers, home affected work, and vice versa. The effects were both day-to-day and long-term, but the long-term ones were more conscious and significant to the teachers themselves, as the examples below suggest.

Home and Work: Examples of Daily Relations. For Randy, home sometimes encroached on daily teaching. During the first weeks of the study, particularly, Randy seemed distracted or preoccupied during parts of some class sessions.

Randy began the morning by paying close attention to the craft table. In doing so he ignored the majority of the children, who were having "free play" in various other parts of the room. The "free play" children were considerably more active, interactive, and full of conversation, compared to the craft table children. Presumably Randy was making sure that the craft table activity went smoothly; but in doing so he missed out on most of the social events for that part of the morning. (Week 2, pp. 6-7) (8)

As the semester went on, though, Randy became more consistently responsive to the children.

Today Randy took the kids outdoors for free play. The children had a good time swinging, climbing, and sliding on the

playground equipment. Randy looked cheerful throughout this time--meaning that he smiled frequently at things the children did or said. Once I heard him laugh heartily at something a child said; but the wind made it hard to make out the exact words. (Week 8, p. 62)

As time went on, Randy became more "psychologically present" and interactive with the children. These changes occurred even though his beliefs about the importance of oral language remained constant throughout the course of the study. The changes also occurred even though Randy had literally had years of experience in talking with children already, even before the study began.

Major changes outside work help account for the changes in Randy's behavior. First, just before the beginning of the study, Randy had divorced from his wife. This event forced him to refinance his house, and to lose daily contact with his teenage daughter, who had always supported his commitment to early childhood education--"and she used to even visit my class," he said. Second, his son had recently been arrested for minor theft; and Randy took two days off from teaching early in the study in order to go to court about this problem. And third, early in the time of the study, Randy's (aging) mother sold her house and moved into a retirement home. As the geographically closest child, Randy was heavily involved after school in making the arrangements for this move. "I'm caught in the middle, as they say," he said, meaning that he had responsibilities for relatives both older and younger than himself.



For Louise as well, life outside of school often influenced her approach to teaching. When she felt hard-pressed, her classes would be less planned and she would draw on her pre-existing, large store of ideas for materials and spontaneous, unplanned activities. One Monday morning, for example, she confessed to feeling exceptionally tired. Her weekend had been taken up with family and professional events: an all-day workshop on Saturday and a family gathering on Sunday involving her elderly mother and large extended family (Week 5, p. 15). Her class that morning seemed about as open or free as usual, and Louise responded to the children in her usual manner. She later said, though, that the structured circle time at the end of the session, involving a song and discussion about feelings, had been completely spontaneous. On other, less tired days, Louise showed a great deal of preparation, preparation which made her extremely effective in dealing with the children.

Compared to Randy and Louise, Janice approached teaching in a generally more structured way, and she often therefore found it hard to do all of the planning and preparation that she thought was necessary. She continued to struggle to plan thoroughly, though, because she said, "I wouldn't be able to live with myself if I didn't do it right" (Week 5, p. 24). She frequently talked about feeling hard-pressed for time, especially after she gave birth to her first child.

Janice said that before having a child, her marriage "had been much more egalitarian, and we each went our own way." Now, though, she cannot plan anything for an evening "unless

I know way in advance." She finds herself with the majority of child care responsibilities, and says she feels tied down as a result. She can no longer go to workshops or meetings in the evening even if she wants to. She also says she resents having to rush home after work and take all her work with her. (Week 11, pp. 46-47)

Janice would have liked to stay late after school to arrange the room, plan activities, and organize materials, as she had done earlier in her career, before she had children. (Week 26, pp. 99-100). Although she seemed to have maintained high standards for her program anyway, it was at the cost of constant time pressure, and of a sense of urgency.

In Janice's (implicit) opinion, too much spillover usually occurs between home and school, and teachers have to work at minimizing it. Janice herself took pains to keep home and teaching separate: as the study progressed, she became more strict about when she was willing to be interviewed, and more cautious about the information she disclosed. Implicit in these efforts, though, was a recognition of the power of Janice's job to "take over" her personal life.

Louise had allowed the line between personal life and her job to become quite blurred. When she lacked time during the week, she often suggested that parents of her students call her on the weekend. She did not mind being "a neutral person that parents can talk to about family problems" (Week 5, p. 19). She reported shopping for school food and supplies at the same time that she did her own shopping; she said she pre-

pared school activities at home, and invited former students over for dinner; and at night she consulted with her aide on the phone about problems and activities from class.

Louise regarded--or at least referred to--the parents of some of her former students as her personal friends. Frequently she attended meetings with them, belonged to associations with them, and sometimes ran workshops for parents and other educators on her own time. She complained about these "demands," but usually accepted them cheerfully, recognizing that in most cases, they were self-imposed.

She felt that it was part of doing her job properly to be involved in teacher-support groups, community associations and professional organizations that were furthering the development of good early childhood education. This meant that her job further invaded her personal life and sometimes left her exhausted. (Week 12, pp. 56-57)

All three teachers described particularly close friends they found through work, who served as confidantes and advisors on various topics, both personal and professional. Randy's school-based relationships were not numerous, but they were lasting and significant. They consisted primarily of two individuals: a female teacher, mentioned further below, and Mr. Gardner, the school's resource teacher. Evidence of contact with Mr. Gardner was not hard to find:

Part way through group time, Mr. Gardner (Randy's close friend) came in and whispered something in Randy's ear. While the children waited, Randy replied quietly, "I was at Hamilton

(high school) this morning. It was interesting--I'll tell you about it more later." (Week 4, p. 26)

Randy (to KS during interview): Richard Gardner is probably the closest friend I have at school. Last year we tried taking one other staff member with us to lunch every week. But eventually we stopped because having the others got in the way of talking. (Week 9, p. 66)

The selective, intense pattern of Randy's relationships contrasted markedly to the two women, who each reported broader, more extensive networks. Randy's intensive pattern probably also helped create an impression that home and work did not overlap at least in his own mind, and perhaps also in the minds of casual acquaintances not in his inner circle.

Q: How much work do you take home with you?

Randy: I like it that with teaching, you can do most of your work at school. Having an aide helps with this, too. I don't think much about school at home. Maybe if a child is having trouble. (Week 4, p. 26)

In spite of this belief, though, Randy's actions did not suggest such a clean separation.

As pointed out below, too, Randy's first wife and children influenced his motivation to teach, both positively and negatively. Their effects were not as "daily" or immediate as Mr. Gardner's, nor as those of a new woman whom he was quite close to during the study, and whom he later married. The new woman, as it happened, also worked

at his school. She probably therefore blurred home and school life significantly, and possibly even more than Randy's previous family relationships had done.

Both Janice and Louise made close and important friends in the early childhood professional community. The community was "almost incestuous," according to Janice, because "each time you meet a new person, you find out that they have connections to all kinds of other people you know" (Week 8, p. 39). The network included teachers, university and community figures, and consultants with various school districts. Friendships with members of these groups were particularly important for Janice and Louise at the beginning of their teaching careers. Each of them had been fortunate enough to find support and information from colleagues in their first teaching jobs (Week 26, pp. 97-98). Both of them were now teaching in schools where they felt isolated from networks of support. Louise actively sought out like-minded people and groups on her own time. Janice, perhaps because she had small children and could not get out as much, complained of being isolated from the network.

"You don't realize," (she said,) "how valuable it is until it's not there anymore. I feel as if I'm running the whole thing on my own. I still want to do it right, but who else even cares?! No one else in the school really knows what I'm doing. I don't blame them. They don't have time. And I guess I don't care what they're doing in Grade 6." (Week 11, pp. 44-45)

Home and Work: Effects on Long-term Choices. In the consciousness of the teachers, home and school influenced each other more over the long term than over the short term. Among all three individuals, for example, levels of commitment to early education depended in various ways on who was currently in (or out of) a teacher's family. Randy and Louise both believed that raising children of their own helped inspire their classroom teaching.

Q: Can you trace your interest in young children back in your life?

Randy: My wife was involved in early childhood education. We had discussions. My kids were 2- and 4-years old. I was fascinated by their learning. Versus in high school (teaching which I had done previously): there the kids were a bunch of faces. You didn't know if they were learning or what. (Week 9, p. 47)

As these comments imply, spouses also made a difference--though not always a positive one. In another interview, Randy put it this way:

Q: Did Fern (your wife) influence your decision to go into early childhood education?

Randy: Yes, she really did. And my kids were preschool age, and that stimulated my interest. Fran used to talk about her work when she came home.

Q: Does that mean that when you broke up, you questioned your commitment to early education?

Randy: Yes I did, but not consciously. And fortunately not permanently. During the last several years, Fern and I just never spoke to each other much about our work. I would invite her to visit my classroom, but she never came--always "too busy" or something. (Interview, Week 12, p. 138)

Janice too pointed out that her spouse had encouraged her to enter early childhood education. She had met him part way through her year at the Faculty of Education, when he had already been teaching in prekindergarten and kindergarten for several years. "When we went to the library, he'd always check out about 50 children's books that he thought I should know about. Then he'd read to me. He's the one who taught me to do 'voices'" (Week 26, pp. 97-98). (Janice was a wonderfully dramatic storyteller, with a range of vocal styles that kept her class enthralled.)

Her husband had also first directed her attention to in-service workshops she could attend in this field that sparked her interest in innovative programming in early childhood education. Subsequently his career had gone in other directions, so that what was initially a daily influence was probably now more general. Unlike Randy, she had not separated from her spouse. Perhaps for this reason, therefore, her reports about her husband's influence were more consistently positive than Randy's reports about his wife's influence.

Louise's comments about family influence had more of the double-edged quality of Randy's, but for different reasons. Louise had been a single-parent for all of her life as a teacher. For her, therefore,

"family influence" had more to with her son and his development. than with a spouse. Giving birth to her son had originally helped to inspire and motivate her involvement in early education.

I started taking courses in child development at the university because I wanted to do everything right--be a 'super-mom'." (Week 3, p. 6)

"I met people there who had great ideas and I got hooked. I wanted to teach kindergarten because I wanted to work with kids, to help them, in ways that didn't put more pressure on them, the way later school does." (Week 12, pp. 54-55)

Now that her son was graduating from high school, though, Louise felt less enthusiastic; "The kids aren't as cute any more," she said. Whether this feeling would eventually pass, as did Randy's reaction to his divorce, still remained to be seen at the time of the study. Whatever the eventual outcome, though, her reactions testified to the importance of personal relationships not only in creating commitments to teaching, but in challenging those commitments as well.

Like many other teachers, personal circumstances also caused extended work interruptions for Randy, Janice, and Louise. But the interruptions had complex effects on the teachers' professional selves. In some ways all three of the teachers' maintained commitment to teaching anyway, as Biklen observed. But to some extent, too, their commitment seemed to wax and wane in response to events outside themselves.

Janice and Louise, for example, each interrupted teaching to bear children. But the effect of the interruption differed for the two women.



Janice emphasized repeatedly that "having children made no difference to my coming into this field"; but Louise emphasized almost as repeatedly that "my children made early education seem more urgent and important." Randy left teaching for one year to start a small sporting goods store. At the time, his action implied lack of interest in early education. But he was back teaching kindergarten again a year later, even though his store prospered economically. "I missed the kids," he said simply.

Internalized commitment to teaching seemed to exist among these three teachers, then, but it did so in the midst of other, competing goals and commitments. The other commitments could be considered either "internal" or "external" to the individual teachers, depending on how they were viewed. From either perspective, though, they affected teachers' priorities, and therefore also the teachers' commitment to teaching.

#### CONCLUSIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE

These results suggest several conclusions about professionalism and the relation of home and work in early childhood education. First, personal life and teaching can affect each other not only among women, but among men as well--or at least among some individuals of both sexes. Like Janice, Louise, and Randy, individual teachers establish a variety of relationships between home and school, even if the relationship amounts to seeking a "divorce" of one from the other, as Janice tended to do. Among women, Spencer (9) has already shown the variety that spillovers between home and school can take. This study confirms that variety, but also suggests that spillovers are not confined to women.

Second, the results suggest that what is gender related may be the direction of spillovers, and not their mere existence. For the male teacher in this study, influence worked most obviously from home to school. Randy's family affected his decision and commitment to teach, as well as his questioning of that decision and commitment. Events in his family sometimes also affected his daily behavior in class. But Randy reported comparatively little evidence that teaching spilled over in the other direction. Such effects did occur in that direction, from school to home: Randy did make friends with one teacher and marry another. But most daily school activities and relationships remained at school, and appeared to encroach little on Randy's daily personal time.

For the two female teachers, though, influence worked more explicitly in both directions, both from school to home and vice versa. Like Randy, Janice and Louise also reported emotional support from family members--Janice from her spouse, and Louise from watching her son grow up. But both women also filled many evening and weekends with people, materials, or activities related to their daily teaching. The line between home and school, and between friends and colleagues, seemed more unclear for Janice and Louise, than for Randy.

This pattern confirms, but also qualifies, previous research showing stress or "role overload" among women who combine thorough work commitment with other family responsibilities (10). Like that previous research, this study found the women's lives very full of responsibilities, and indeed verging on being overly full. But this study also found the man's life full of responsibilities, and in its own way overly full as

well. What differed for the two genders here was not the existence of overload, but its sources and signs.

Third, in addition to blurring gender differences about the relations of home and work, this study found evidence of the stable, internalized commitment to teaching that Biklen (11) previously described in successful elementary teachers. But the evidence was mixed. The three teachers' enthusiasm and commitment actually originated and developed from mixtures of external circumstances and lasting personal motives; and as the external supports waxed and waned, so did the teachers' enjoyment of children, in spite of its underlying constancy. Randy, Janice, and Louise continued to care about teaching, literally for years, as Biklen found with her elementary teachers. But these three individuals also cared more when well supported by spouses and by children of a "relevant" (that is, young) age, and by sympathetic peers. When these external supports failed, finished, or left, commitment faltered, but did not disappear.

Biklen's idea of internalized commitment may therefore be right, but also in need of qualification. It seems in particular that role overload may foster both a socially traditional and a revised form of commitment at the same time, at least in early childhood education. It may trigger an "old" or traditional separation of work and family; but it may also stimulate a "new" internalized commitment, one freed from the need for continuous, physical presence in the workplace. In early education, women and men may live with these conflicting notions of professionalism at the same time.

Furthermore, internalized commitment may develop more in some circumstances than others. Perhaps it develops more among women than men, for example, since women are socialized more fully to care for the young. Or perhaps it develops more fully among teachers in high-status elite schools, like Biklen originally studied, since conditions in elite schools may make internalized commitment both more possible and more worthwhile. For now these are simply possibilities, waiting for appropriate qualitative research to test them. The present study was a first step in this direction.

NOTES

1. Sharon Feiman-Nemser and R. Floden. "The Cultures of Teaching," in Handbook of Research on Teaching, 3d ed., ed. Merlin Wittrock (New York: Macmillan, 1986).
2. Daniel Lortie, Schoolteacher (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).
3. Michael Sedlak and S. Schlossman, "Who Will Teach? Historical Perspectives of the Changing Appeal of Teaching as a Profession," in Review of Research in Education, ed. Edmund Gordon (Washington, D. C.: American Educational Research Association, 1987).
4. Kelvin Seifert, "Men in Early Childhood Education," in Professionalism in early childhood education, ed. Bernard Spodek, Olivia Saracho, and Donald Peters (New York: Teachers' College Press, 1988). See also Kelvin Seifert, "The Culture of Early Education and the Preparation of Male Teachers," Early Child Development and Care, 10 (Fall 1988): pp. 35-50.
5. For a good example of the viewpoint that professional development reflects realms of development in all realms of living, and not just in the realm of work, see Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot, "The Lives of Teachers," in Handbook of Teaching and Policy, eds. Lee Shulman and Gary Sykes (New York: Longman, 1983). For a portrait of the professionalism implicit in not dedicating oneself totally to work, see Sari Knopp Biklen, "Can Elementary Schoolteaching Be a Career? A Search for New Ways of Understanding Women's Work," Issues in Education, 3(3), pp. 215-231. Biklen uses elementary education teachers for subjects--admittedly not not quite the same as early childhood teachers, but the two types of

teachers share important career circumstances and educational values nonetheless.

6. Lortie, Schoolteacher. A newer viewpoint about male teachers in particular is Seifert, "The Culture of Early Education and the Preparation of Male Teachers."
7. J. Goetz and M. Lecompte, Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research (New York: Academic Press, 1984).
8. All quotations are from the field notes of the study, which are available on request. For each quotation, the page number cited is the consecutive page in the field notes for the particular case-study teacher cited. The "Week" number refers to the time of contact for that particular teacher. "Week 2" in this quotation, for example, occurred during the second week of contact with Randy, which was not the second week for the other two teachers.
9. Dee Ann Spencer, Contemporary Women Teachers: Balancing Home and School (New York: Longman, 1986).
10. Joseph Pleck, "Husband's Paid Work and Family Roles," Research on the Interweave of Social Roles, 3 (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1983).
11. Biklen, "Can Elementary Schoolteaching Be a Career?"